

News Release



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Children's programs in California State Parks

California State Parks Invites Kids to Join Junior Ranger and "Litter-Getter" Programs

"Can you hear the rocks?" the ranger asks, holding a crumbly rock up to her ear as if it were whispering its secrets to her. "They all have stories to tell you about this land long before it was a park."

The ranger bends down to show the group of ten junior rangers the scallop fossil that lies beneath their feet. One excited child blurts out, "You mean that this mountain was under the ocean?"

"Great detective work, that's right!" The ranger answers. "Even though we are well above the ocean now, these rocks were formed under the ocean and pushed up millions of years ago. Let's see what other fossils we can find along this trail. Find one you like, and use your Junior Ranger logbook and crayon to make a rubbing that you can take home with you."

"Why should we leave these fossils where we find them?" the ranger challenges the kids. "That's easy," the group answers in a jumble of voices. "The park belongs to everyone and if we take them no one else will get to see them."

Once the kids have discovered their own special fossils and made their rubbings, they gather in the cool shade of a large sycamore tree. They each share their picture and tell an imagined story of how their fossil came to be up on the mountain.

After completing some other activities, the junior rangers follow their leader back to where they met. The ranger stamps their logbooks and they all read the Junior Ranger pledge together. Several children are excited as they're given badges for attending their first program, while others are happy to have advanced a step toward earning future awards. Waving goodbye to the ranger, a few kids lead their parents away to share their discoveries. "I never knew that rocks could tell such good stories!" says one smiling boy to his grandpa.

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Each year, tens of thousands of young park visitors participate in “Junior Rangers” at more than sixty California state parks. In some places, the regular junior ranger program—designed for seven- to twelve-year-olds—is joined by a “Cubs” program for younger boys and girls. Another option is the “Junior Ranger Adventure Guide”—a self-guided activity booklet that’s ideal for families who are unable to attend a scheduled program. This year you can look for some exciting changes to the materials that junior rangers receive, made possible through a generous grant from the T. J. Long Foundation and ongoing support from the California State Parks Foundation.

“Litter-Getters” is a separate hands-on environmental education program for kids that helps instill a “park ethic” based on stewardship and recycling. Children pick up litter in participating parks, and each time they return a bag of trash they are given a colorful sticker to place inside a fun, informative brochure. When a full set of stickers has been collected, the boy or girl can claim an additional prize. Many California state parks welcome eager young litter-getters every year.

Certain parks offer a third type of program for youngsters: “Junior Lifeguards.” Generally, children between 9 and 15 years of age can apply to become junior lifeguards. Activities include swimming, surfing, and bodyboarding as well as various games and competitions. Participants are instructed in water safety, first-aid, CPR, rescue techniques, and appropriate environmental topics. A fee is charged for this popular program, which extends over a period of several weeks.

You can learn more about Junior Rangers or Litter-Getters by going online at www.parks.ca.gov (click on the “Kids Site” or “Adventures in Learning”) or by phoning (916) 653-8959. For information about Junior Lifeguards, call (831) 649-7132.

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